A MESSAGE FROM THE ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS

Another year has ended and I am happy to announce that we have chosen a new group of Dean’s Distinguished Graduates. Among them are two ROTC students who plan to continue serving their country; several DDGs have chosen to enter career fields ranging from student affairs to teaching; and the remaining plan to continue their education by attending graduate schools across the nation. These 12 students all possess the dedication, leadership, and academic excellence that reflect the mission of the college and university.

We have also continued to work toward building our relationship with you by working with Brian Siegal to create even more ways to stay involved in what you are doing. If you are interested in helping us build this foundation, we welcome you to provide suggestions on how best to accomplish this.

Finally, in an effort to improve communication and share updates with you, we are moving the DDG Alumni Newsletters to an online-only format. They will be posted on our website, which will allow us to offer you more up-to-date information about happenings with other alumni and events in the college. Please be sure to contact Monica Horvat at monicah@austin.utexas.edu with your email address so you can be notified when additional newsletters are posted.

I look forward to starting a new year and seeing who will emerge as the DDG class of 2012. Until then, Hook ‘em Horns!

Sincerely,
Marc Musick
Associate Dean for Student Affairs
Write on Target: Paralympic Archer Shoots for Gold in the Literary World

A passing comment from a sixth-grade teacher sent Lindsey Carmichael, a senior majoring in history and English, on the road to the Olympics. When the math teacher overheard her talking with her best friend about the girl’s softball team, he blurted, “I bet you could do archery in a wheelchair.” “He just wanted to make me feel better about not being able to play softball and then go on with his day,” says Carmichael, who was diagnosed at age four with McCune Albright Syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that causes weak spots in her bones. “But that one comment completely changed my life.”

On a whim, Carmichael and her friend convinced their parents to take them to an archery club near their hometown in Lago Vista. After a couple of weeks her friend dropped out, but Carmichael carried on, driven by her desire to compete.

Now a two-time Paralympian at age 25, Carmichael is one of the world’s greatest archers. In Athens, she set a world record in the ranking round and finished sixth overall. She later went on to win the bronze medal in Beijing, making her the first female archer representing the United States to medal in a singles competition in 34 years.

Unlike most sports that require strong, powerful physiques, Carmichael says archery appealed to her because anyone — tall, short, heavyset or even one-armed — can compete. The strength, she notes, comes from the mind. After some bad tournaments in 2005, Carmichael’s self-confidence dwindled, causing her to develop Target Panic, a common phenomenon among archers that causes athletes to falter before making a shot. During a critical match in the 2008 Beijing Paralympics, the unrelenting anxiety caused her to miss a shot that would have landed her in the running for the gold or silver.

“I remember thinking I can just wallow in this horrible feeling or I can suck it up and do what I came here to do,” Carmichael says. “The proudest moment of my life was when I shoved that overwhelming sense of failure out of my mind, walked into the stadium with a smile on my face and won the bronze.”

During tough times, Carmichael harnesses her strength by recalling her favorite quote by basketball coach John Wooden: “Don’t let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.” By focusing on what she can do, she has overcome obstacles on the field and in her studies.

With her positive attitude and strong self-discipline, she won several awards from writing contests for her essays, poetry, and short fiction. This spring, she will walk across the stage as one of the 12 Dean’s Distinguished Graduates, a high honor given to graduating seniors for their leadership, scholarly achievements, and service to the community.

G. Howard Miller, distinguished teaching associate professor of history and religious studies, says Carmichael may very well be the most extraordinary undergraduate he has ever taught during his 40 years at the university. “Through years of heroic personal effort and with the steady support of her equally remarkable family, Lindsey overcame very serious obstacles to become a world-class student athlete, a thoughtful and creative student, and an unfailing inspiration to one and all,” says Miller, who recently retired in 2010. “And all this she did with grace, humility, and a wonderfully infectious sense of humor. She is truly one of a kind.”

After graduation, Carmichael said she will be “in training” to become a New York Times bestselling author. “I’m training to be the best writer I can be,” Carmichael says. “If one of my books ever makes it to the New York Times bestselling list, that’s going to be right on par with standing on that podium in Beijing.”
Stephen Mercer: Outstanding History Student 2011

Stephen Mercer had a circuitous route to becoming a Dean's Distinguished Graduate, one of only 12 students from the College of Liberal Arts.

A native Georgian, Mercer found his way to The University of Texas through the very selective process of the United States Marine Corps' Enlisted Commissioning Education Program.

He is completing his degree requirements in less than four years — a feat many find difficult enough to accomplish, much less while serving as a staff sergeant in the Corps. Mercer missed one entire academic semester to attend the requisite Marine Corps Officer Candidate School.

United States Navy Captain D.N. Dixon, professor of naval science wrote in his letter of recommendation that Mercer has “... dedicated over 1,000 hours assisting in the professional development of more than 100 midshipmen associated with our program. Staff Sergeant Mercer worked tirelessly to capture his experiences and generate a comprehensive training plan consisting of academic classes, field exercises, and physical training to prepare students for the rigors of future military service.”

Mercer’s Marine Officer Instructor Major Ty Kopke, an assistant professor of naval science, who spends close to 12 hours each day with students (and some weekends) wrote: “Stephen’s weaknesses are on par with most students’ strengths. He is a master of time management.”

Mercer is already responsible for the supervision of 63 other NROTC students. Major Kopke says Mercer “is a master of delegation, supervision, planning, and execution. Every aspect of his life is scrutinized.”

To date, he has served more than eight years in the U.S. Marine Corps that has already included multiple military operations on four continents and eight countries, often contending without the benefit of language translators or the presence of higher-level leadership.

He is a veteran of the 2006 military surge in Iraq and participated in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s operation to protect assets of up to $1 billion as they were transported through the Mediterranean Sea area.

Mercer’s father played an instrumental role in his choice of career and college major. As a U.S. Army solider deployed to Europe, the senior Mercer took the family with him. It was there that the younger Mercer learned “to love history at an early age,” he said.

After graduation, he will be commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps. More travel and further education are also planned with the eventual intent of returning to the university as a history professor.

Mercer enjoys non-contact sports such as running, swimming, and rock climbing.

It’s no wonder he finds inspiration from a bestselling author and runner, the late Dr. George A. Sheehan, “Success means having the courage, the determination, and the will to become the person you believe you were meant to be.”

Written May, 2011, by Martha-Gail Moore, Web Content Manager, Department of History
Nubia Victoria Bentancourt, born and raised just outside of Los Angeles, California, joined the Navy in 2000. Fluent in Arabic, Swahili, and Spanish, she has worked as a linguist for 11 years. After graduation, Nubia hopes to work as a cultural liaison between the U.S. military and indigenous people worldwide.

Lindsey Ann Carmichael is a native Texan who spent her childhood in nearby Lago Vista. She is a writer and two-time Paralympic athlete. In 2008, she participated in the Paralympic games in Beijing and became the first woman archer, able-bodied or otherwise, to win a medal for the U.S. in 34 years. After graduation she will set her sights on publication in historical research and creative fiction novels.

Shelby Frances Carvalho moved from California to Texas as the first person in her family to attend college. She has found and pursued her passion for a global understanding of education through service, leadership, and research on four continents. She looks forward to continuing her journey with Teach for America in Phoenix, Arizona.

Willie Gray Cochran has enjoyed serving as Straw Boss in the Texas Cowboys organization, as chairman of the Plan II Praxis committee, and as student assistant to Professor Lee Walker for his Signature Course, Pathways to Civic Engagement. Willie looks forward to beginning law school in the fall at Stanford University.

Frances Erin Deavers is from Houston, Texas, and is an older sister to four younger brothers. She is majoring in Psychology and plans on pursing a doctorate in clinical psychology after graduation.

Denisa Gandara was born in the small town of San Benito in the Rio Grande Valley. While at UT Austin, she held an internship at Posada Esperanza, a shelter for immigrant women and children. Denisa also conducted research in the sociology of language through the McNair Post baccalaureate Achievement Program under Professor Hans Boas. Next fall, she will start a fully-funded Ph.D. program at the University of Georgia in Athens.

Monica Anne Gully hails from DeSoto, Texas, where she has enjoyed competitive swimming and playing piano. She now lives in Austin and can often be found writing, hosting events for students in Liberal Arts, and reciting lines from various Shakespeare plays for whomever will listen. She plans on pursuing graduate studies and a career in student affairs.

Matthew Eric Ramirez grew up in Mission, Texas, before coming to UT Austin to pursue a degree in English and Classics. Matthew researches plot networks in literary drama, in the hope of developing algorithms for interactive drama and collaborative filtering mechanisms. Next fall, he will begin his studies in the doctoral program in English at the University of California, Berkeley.

Jessika Roesner was born in Germany and spent six years there before her family moved to Austin, Texas, in 1994. At UT Austin she has studied Linguistics and Computer Science. In her final two years of study, in collaboration with Dr. Katrin Erk, she conducted research on computational models of word meaning in context, which formed the basis for her senior thesis. Jessika will begin full-time work as a software developer for Indeed.com in Austin this summer.
Brian Siegal was the keynote speaker at this year’s Dean’s Distinguished Graduates Luncheon where he spoke about his time since leaving the Forty Acres. He gave this year’s DDGs advice about being productive community members, how to continue to give back, and how to hold on to what they learned here and apply it to the world.

Born and raised in Birmingham, Alabama, Brian earned his bachelor’s degree with high honors in Humanities in 1995 from UT Austin. He was a notable student who received the President’s Leadership Award and was designated a Dean’s Distinguished Graduate. In 1998 he earned his J.D. with honors at UT and then in 2006, Brian completed a dual master’s program in Public Administration and Jewish Studies at New York University.

Brian currently serves as the director of the Miami and Broward Office of the American Jewish Committee. He is responsible for developing ties and working on policy issues with international leaders, ethnic and religious leaders, government officials, and other community leaders. In addition, he represents the Miami chapter in voluntary and governmental agencies, coalitions, and organizations, and responds to relevant community events. In 2010 and 2011, Brian was named by the Miami Herald as a “20 Under 40” top emerging business leader in Miami, selected by the Florida Jewish Journal as one of eight leaders in Miami’s Jewish community that has made a significant impact, and by Miami Today as a top Non-Profit Executive.

Brian previously served as the American Jewish Committee’s assistant director of Intergroup Affairs and the coordinator of their Hurricane Katrina Relief Fund. Before that, he worked as an associate at two international law firms and also lived in London, working in the British legal system as a Pegasus Trust Fellow through the American Inns of Court Foundation. In addition, Brian has lived in Israel as a Dorot Fellow where he worked at the Israel Democracy Institute and clerked for Chief Justice Aharon Barak at the Israeli Supreme Court.

Brian is married to Rabbi Judith Siegal, of Temple Judea in Coral Gables, and they have two sons and a daughter.

Why did you get into your current line of work? How did you get started?

Throughout both my education and career, I pursued my passion for racial and ethnic relations. During college at UT, I tailored an academic program focused on racial and ethnic relations that culminated in a thesis paper about relations between Jewish Americans and African Americans from 1960-1995. In addition, my extracurricular activities enabled me to practice many of the ideas and concepts that I was learning about in my classes including a conference on race relations at the University of Texas.

What’s the best advice you didn’t take?

There is no reason to change the course you are on – just wait and opportunities will find you.

What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success?

Never stop learning and find a balance between pragmatism and idealism – you should follow your passion, but also be sure that you can find a job and that you are prepared to excel in that career.

Why did you decide to attend UT of Austin?

As an 18-year-old freshman from Birmingham, Alabama, I came to UT knowing one person who was a friend from high school that was a year ahead of me and told me to visit – after visiting for a few days I knew that there was no place on earth like Austin, Texas, and no institution like UT. This experience gave me the confidence to move to different places around the world where I didn’t know anyone and become deeply engaged in different communities.

Is there a specific instructor/professor that made a large impact on you? What did they say or do to influence you?

Then UT President Robert Berdahl, Vice President of Student Affairs Jim Vick, and my college thesis advisor S. Dale McLemore. They each gave me opportunities to grow and learn and confidence to pursue my interests.

“As human beings, we are more comfortable with predictability and certainty, but in the world we are living in today we must adjust to a new permanent life-long learning curve.”

-Taken from a portion of the speech Brian delivered at the DDG luncheon, May 19, 2011.
UPDATE TO DDG ALUMNI ASSOCIATION FACEBOOK PAGE

Since the creation of the DDG Alumni Association Facebook page, several alumni and friends have joined the group, which allows them to stay connected to each other and the college.

Recently, the administrators of Facebook sent a notification stating that the alumni page is scheduled to be archived which will move all of the wall posts, photos, and discussion threads to the “new groups” format. Until this happens, no additional pictures can be uploaded to the site and there will be limited communication with its members. Once the new group page has been created, all current members will need to be re-added. When the transition is complete, you will be invited to join the new group via email and Facebook.

If you have any questions about this process or if you would like to update your contact information to ensure you continue to receive updates and information about the alumni association please contact Monica Horvat at monicah@austin.utexas.edu.